Deutscher Präventionstag –
der Jahreskongress seit 1995

PVE Lessons from Anthropology, Psychology, Neuroscience

von

Alexander Ritzmann

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Relevant Research Findings for PVE Practice and Policy from the Fields of Anthropology, Psychology and Neuroscience

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Key Questions

- Why do people radicalise?
- Why do so few individuals radicalise?
- Under which circumstances do people change their minds on identity and values?

Relevant research findings from the fields of *anthropology*, *psychology* and *neuroscience*

- Atran, S., Gómez, Á., López-Rodríguez, L., Sheikh, H., Ginges, J., Wilson, L., Waziri, H., Vázquez, & A. Davis, R. (2017). **The devoted actor's will to fight and the spiritual dimension of human conflict.** *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1(9), 673.

- Chan, M. P. S., Jones, C. R., Hall Jamieson, K., & Albarracín, D. (2017). **Debunking: a meta-analysis of the psychological efficacy of messages countering misinformation**. *Psychological science, 28*(11), 1531-1546.

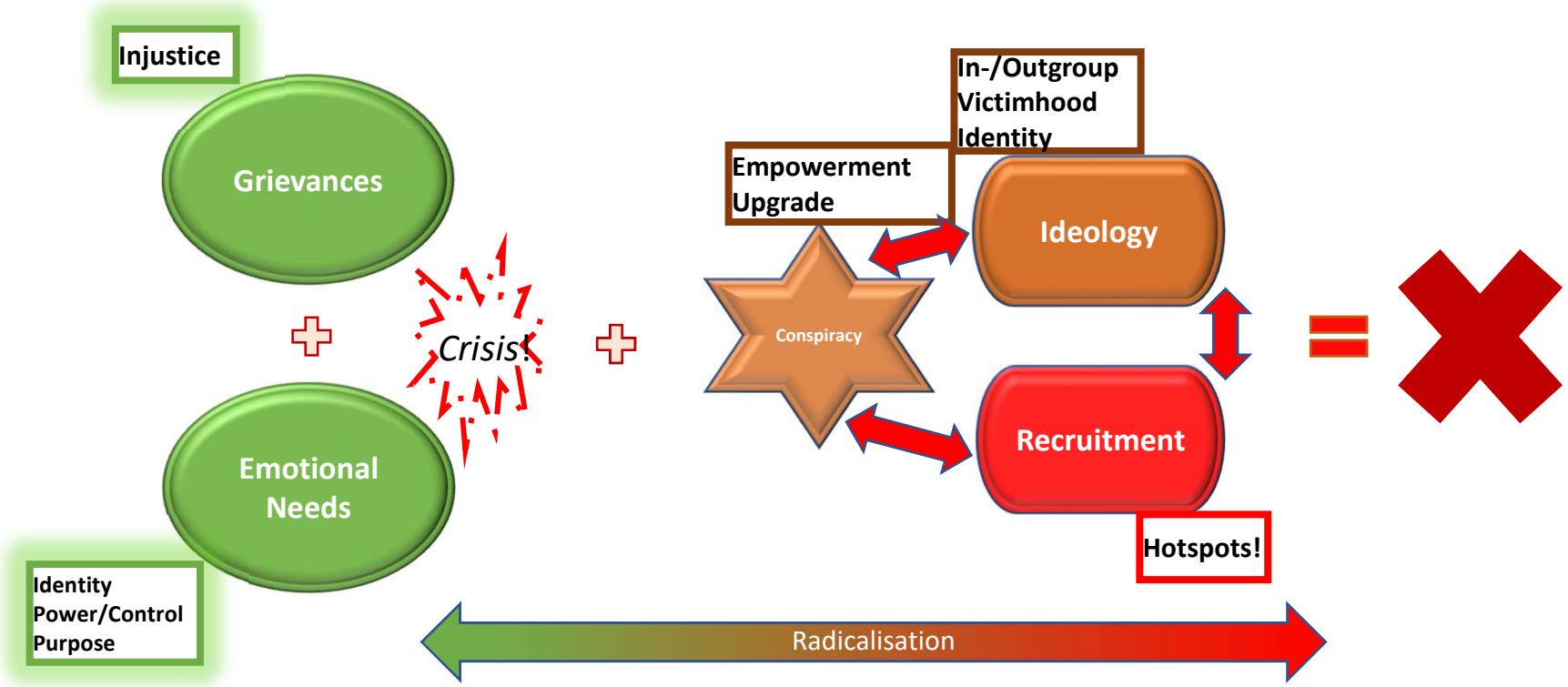
- Sapolsky, Robert (2017). Behave: **The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst** (Penguin Press)

- Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2015). **From gulf to bridge: When do moral arguments facilitate political influence?.** *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 41*(12), 1665-1681
- Green, Melanie C. & Fitzgerald, K. (2017). **Transportation Theory Applied to Health and Risk Messaging**. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication
- Hornik, R., Jacobsohn, L., Orwin, R., Piesse, A., & Kalton, G. (2008). **Effects of the national youth anti-drug media campaign on youths**. *American Journal of Public Health*, *98*(12), 2229-2236.
- Kaplan, J. T., Gimbel, S. I., & Harris, S. (2016). **Neural correlates of maintaining one's political beliefs in the face of counterevidence.** *Scientific reports*, *6*, 39589

Why do people radicalise?

„Six Factors“ – Extremism Model

Alexander Ritzmann



Why do so few individuals radicalise?

Biological Algorithms

- **Tribes and tribal thinking**
  - Humans value being a good member of their 'tribe' much more than being correct. We will choose to be wrong if it keeps us in good standing with our group

- **Motivated Reasoning**
  - **Filter Bubbles**: Our confirmation bias preselects information that is confirming our believes over conflicting input *to protect us*
    - Youth?

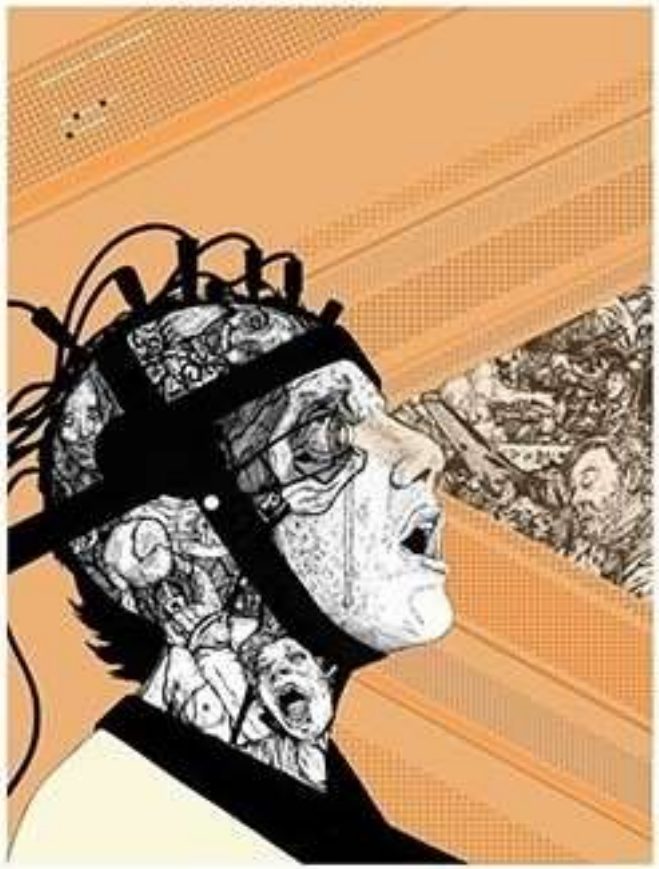
- **Echo Chambers**
  - Humans surround themselves with like minded people, offline and online
  - Echo chambers are *not* closed – they often highlight the positions of the „others“ to foster bonding through outrage
  - (Reverse) Mere-Exposure-Effect

Online Effects

- Tribal Signaling (Fake news)
- Constant crisis

Radicalisation Tango

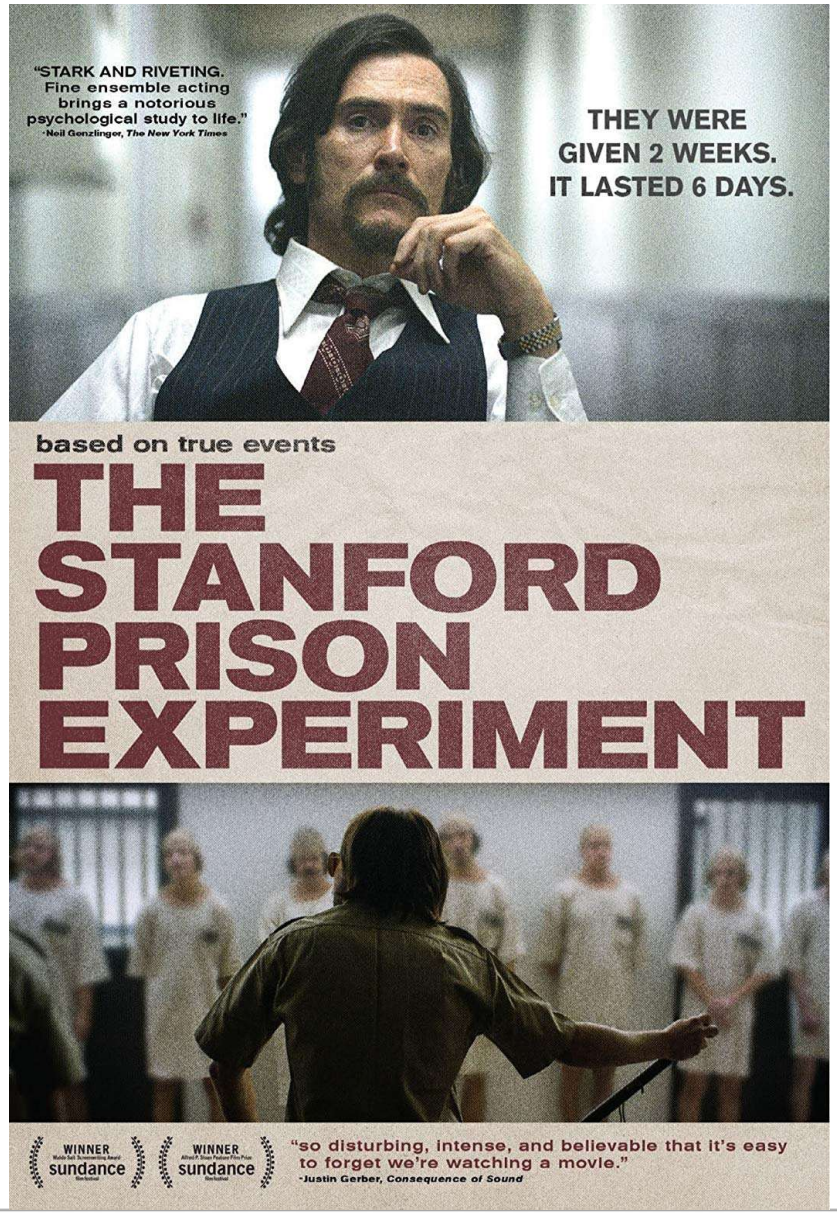
Who is leading who?



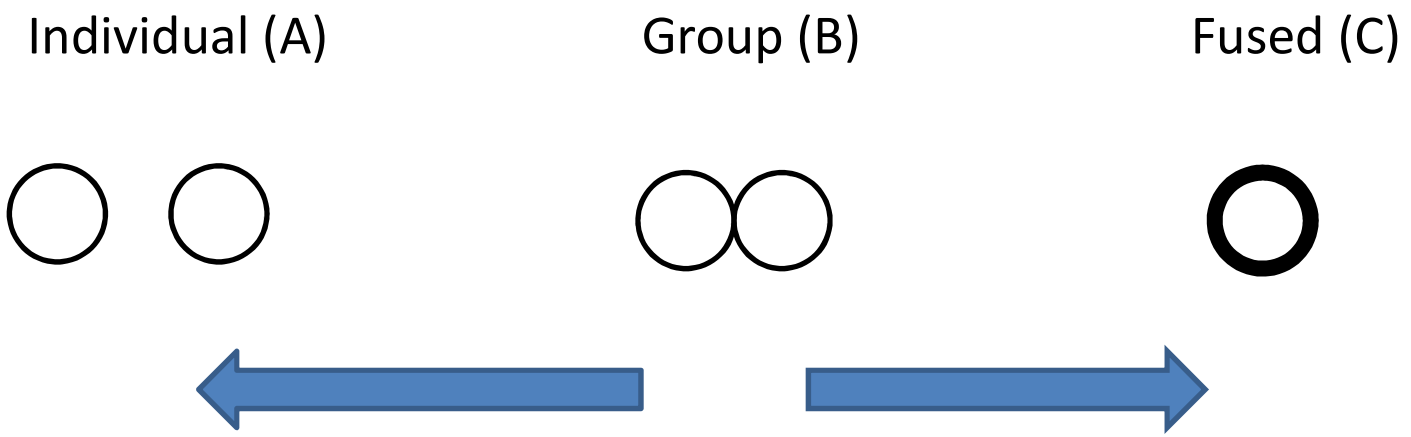
https://www.pravda-tv.com/2017/11/gehirnwaesche-fuer-politisch-inkorrekte-erste-menschenversuche/

https://artandmartini.deviantart.com/art/Tango-383594923

Under which circumstances do people change their minds on identity and values?


"STARK AND RIVETING. Fine ensemble acting brings a notorious psychological study to life."
-Neil Gonzlinger, The New York Times
THEY WERE GIVEN 2 WEEKS. IT LASTED 6 DAYS.
based on true events
THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT
WINNER sundance
WINNER sundance
"so disturbing, intense, and believable that it's easy to forget we're watching a movie."
-Justin Gerber, Consequence of Sound

Identität(en) und Werte



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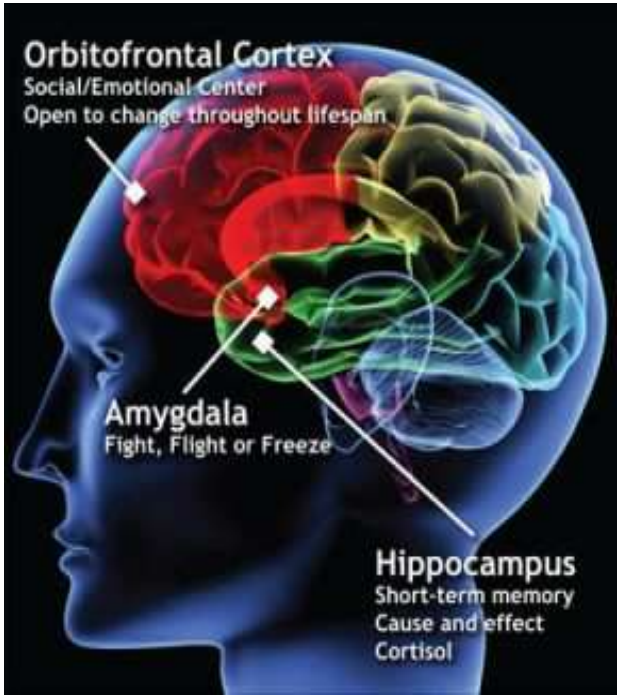

Kaplan, J. T., Gimbel, S. I., & Harris, S. (2016). **Neural correlates of maintaining one's political beliefs in the face of counterevidence**. *Scientific reports*, *6*, 39589.

P/CVE Intervention

P/CVE practitioner

Extremist

http://www.vulture.com/2015/12/how-leo-shouldve-handled-that-bear-attack.html

P/CVE Intervention

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Changing our mind depends on:

- how much we have invested in our old believes

- if our old believes are sacred to us, if they are part of who we are (identity)

- how change will impact our standing with our in-group

- if this change provides us with an upgrade or downgrade of our status quo

How to help people change their mind?

Needed: cognitive/emotional opening – **Crisis (Disillusionment)**

- **Don't be confrontational:** the more radicalized your audience is, and the more their individual identity, morals and sacred values are **"fused"** with an extremist ideology or group**,** the less effective a **confrontational approach** will be (Atran 2016).

- **Use an indirect approach:** alternative or counter-narratives are more likely to resonate with such an audience if you take an indirect approach like **science fiction, adventure, or mystery** (Green 2017/Kaplan 2016).

- **Highlight shared values:** many conflicts are based on **differing moral preferences** rather than detailed political or religious issues. **Highlight shared values** (Feinberg 2015) such as justice, equality and tradition, and use these as a bridge to connect opposing camps.

- **Introduce new information and mental models:** New messages should **offer a new model for understanding the information**. **Elaboration and discourse increase** the likelihood of replacing the old or false model with a new one (Cook 2011).

- **Quantity matters:** a **regular stream of messages** has a higher chance of success (**around 30%)** to help change minds (Cook 2011).

- **Do no harm:** don´t spread extremist propaganda by trying to prevent extremism (Hornik 2008, Chan 2017).

- **Avoid stigmatization:** Be aware that **you might be perceived as stereotyping and mistrusting this group**. Ensure you have a good understanding of the sensitivities and concerns of your target audience, so as **not to foster polarization**.

Key questions and possible answers

- **Why do people radicalise?**
  - To feel better! (empowerment, belonging and purpose)
- **Why do so few individuals radicalise?**
  - Biological Algorithms (Filter Bubbles) protect our core identity and values
- **Under which circumstances do people change their minds on identity and values?**
  - Crisis
  - Personalised recruitment/intervention
  - Realistic/practical alternative
  - Upgrade or at least no downgrade of status quo

RAN Centre of Excellence

RAN ISSUE PAPER

RAN guidelines for effective alternative and counter-narrative campaigns (GAMMMA+)

Extra: Annex with key findings from recent relevant research

G Goal

A Audience

M Message

M Messenger

M Media

A Action

\+

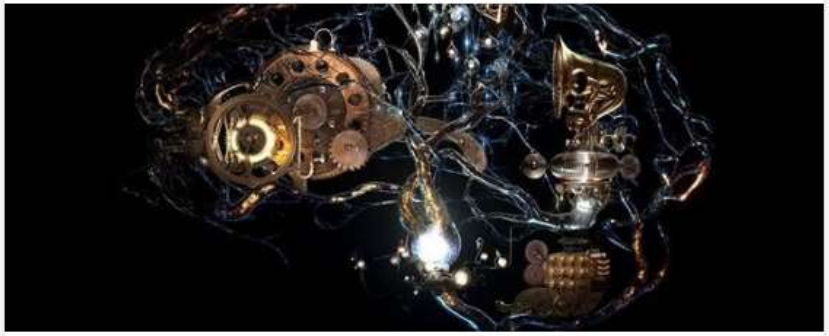
If you want to develop effective alternative and counter-narratives, then these guidelines are for you!

The RAN´s Communication and Narratives working group (RAN C&N) has developed the following practical guidelines for carrying out effective alternative and counter-narrative campaigns. The guidelines combine lessons learned and key elements from the RAN C&N meetings with an easily accessible overview of relevant research.

This paper is written by Alexander Ritzmann (co-chair of RAN C&N) with the support of Marije Meines, RAN CoE

A TRIBAL CALL TO ARMS: PROPAGANDA AND WHAT PVE CAN LEARN FROM ANTHROPOLOGY, PSYCHOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE

June 6, 2018



By Alexander Ritzmann

The Propaganda Process

Is online propaganda really effective? How can it be countered? And what can practitioners of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and policymakers learn from the research findings of other relevant disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology and neuroscience?

Propaganda, understood here as the strategic communication of ideas aiming at manipulating specific target audiences for an extremist cause, generally has three main components. First, it provides a diagnosis of "what is wrong". Secondly, a prognosis of "what needs to be done". Thirdly, a rationale – "who should do it and why" (Wilson 1973).

The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), for example, claims that Islam and Sunni Muslims are under attack (diagnosis), that a Caliphate needs to be created (prognosis), and that YOU need to help in any way you can (rationale).